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ABSTRACT

Systematic data on the life satisfaction of persons living in a rural county of the Southern Appalachian Region and in a metropolitan center located outside the region were reported. Data were collected by means of structured interviews with 400 persons who comprised probability samples of men and women aged 20 to 29 and 60 and over. Life satisfactions were asessed by presenting each respondent with 72 statements constituting 24 scales on satisfactions with self, satisfactions with the immediate social environment, and satisfactions in general outlook. It was found that satisfactions from urban living were greater among the older than among the younger generation, that the greatest rural-urban disparities were found in satisfactions with immediate social environmental conditions, that rural-urban differences in self-image and general outlook were of less magnitude, that the older persons in both residential areas scored higher in subjective rewards than did the younger people, and that older people revealed greater satisfactions in the category of rewards from immediate social environmental conditions than did the younger people. The commonly observed tendency of older people to adjust to and accept their conditions of life and the tendency of younger persons to be dissatisfied with conditions of life were noted. (PS)

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POVERTY AND LIFE SATISFACTION: A RURAL-URBAN COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

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This paper reports systematic data on the life satisfaction of persons living in a designated rural poverty area of the United States. It is assumed that an examination of the subjective aspects of poverty can reveal clues about inequalities, that data on two age groups will reveal some indicators of the cultural transmission of poverty, and that rural findings will be more meaningful when they are compared with those from an urban center. In 1971, data were collected by means of structured interviews with 400 persons who comprised probability samples of men and women aged 20 to 29 and 60 and over living in a rural county of the Southern Appalachian Region and in a metropolitan center located outside of the Region. Life satisfactions were assessed by presenting each respondent with 72 statements constituting 24 scales on satisfactions with self, satisfactions with the immediate social environment, and satisfactions in general outlook. Respondents gave an "agree," a "don't know," or a "disagree" answer to each statement. These responses were scored three, two, and one, respectively, permitting a mean score range from three to nine for each set. Intercorrelations among statements on each scale indicated that the items in each set assessed a common underlying dimension. The findings suggest that life in the metropolitan center offered somewhat greater subjective rewards than life in the rural area. On some scales the rural people scored higher than the urban, and on others no statistically significant differences were found. In both residential areas,

older persons derived greater subjective rewards from their immediate social environment than did younger persons, a finding that probably reflects the tendency of older people to adjust to their conditions of life and the tendency of younger persons to be dissatisfied. The greatest rural-urban disparaties were found in satisfactions derived from the immediate social environment, while rural-urban differences in self-image and general outlook were of less magnitude.

POVERTY AND LIFE SATISFACTION: A RURAL-URBAN COMPARISON

In the 1960's the "rediscovery" of and concern with poverty in the United States stimulated attempts to explain the phenomenon (Breathitt, 1967; Ferman et al., 1968; Fishman, 1966; Harrington, 1962; Larner and Howe, 1969; Meissner, 1966; Moynihan, 1969; Weller, 1965; Will and Vatter, 1965; Youmans, 1967). Several of these authors contend that substantial differences exist between contemporary poverty and that of the past. The old poverty was experienced principally by immigrants to the United States who came to a new land and found unskilled or semi-skilled work in an expanding Nation. These workers viewed poverty as a temporary condition, and they looked forward to the day when they or their children would have greater access to financial resources and thus climb the economic ladder.

The new poverty, in contrast, is made up of internal aliens in an affluent society. It is a poverty of automation - of workers displaced by technological change, of rejected minority groups, of people driven off farmlands, of many old people who face poverty in later life, of deserted women left alone to raise their children, and of young people who are unable to find jobs in a highly technical society. The poor of today tend to regard their poverty as a permanent way of life with little hope for themselves or their children.

Attempts to conceptualize the new poverty are varied and numerous. Three of the more salient perspectives are mentioned here. The most common perspective stresses the inadequacy of income as the distinguishing characteristic of poverty (Watts, 1968). Individuals and families below a

defined poverty line are said to have insufficient income to meet the minimum daily needs of life. Thus the poverty line varies according to the assumption of what constitutes "the daily needs of life." The success of programs aimed at removing economic poverty can thus be measured by the increase in command of goods and services they induce.

The concept of social stratification provides a second perspective on poverty (Miller and Roby, 1969). This approach moves beyond the narrow limits of income and suggests that the central problem is that of quality of life in an industrial society. Social stratification is concerned with the ranking of people in a social system and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in socially important respects. It is not only the poor but the entire society that is at issue.

The social stratification approach suggests that all inequalities - of income and assets, of goods and services, of social relationships and behavior patterns, of attitudes and values, of self-respect and worthiness, and of opportunities for social mobility and participation in decision-making - should be critically examined in the entire society. Miller and Roby (1969) state that efforts to irradicate poverty defined in a narrow sense are forcing the realization that poverty <u>per se</u> is not the main issue. The main task is to bring about changes in inequalities that are imbedded in the system of social stratification in the United States.

A third perspective is that of a culture of poverty. As Lewis (1969) points out, a culture of poverty is not just a matter of deprivation. It is a culture in the traditional anthropological sense in that it provides human beings with a design for living and with a

ready-made set of solutions to problems. It provides a style of life without which the poor could hardly carry on. It includes social structures, systems of interpersonal relationships, and beliefs, attitudes, and values that are passed down from generation to generation. The scarcity of literature on the culture of poverty, according to Lewis (1969), reflects the communication gap existing between the poor in American society and those middle-class persons who are concerned about poverty and would like to do something about it. Analyses of poverty in terms of the concept of culture can reveal important guidelines for programs. The success of such programs can be measured by changes induced not only in improved economic conditions, but also by changes in the complex of behavior, values and attitudes.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this paper is to report systematic data on the life satisfactions of persons living in a designated rural poverty area of the United States. It is assumed that an examination of the subjective aspects of poverty can reveal important clues about inequalities - including economic deprivations - and that by reporting on two age groups some indicators of the cultural transmission of poverty will be provided. In the absence of standards to measure subjective poverty, it is assumed that findings from the rural area will be more meaningful when they are compared with those from a metropolitan center.

METHODS

In 1971, data were collected by means of structured interviews from 400 persons who comprised probability samples of men and women aged 20 to 29 and 60 and over living in a rural county of the Southern Appalachian Region and in a metropolitan center located outside of the

Region.[1] The metropolitan center had a population of about 150,000 and the rural county of about 6,500. City blocks in the urban center and small areas of land in the rural county constituted the sampling units and these were selected according to a table of random numbers to yield approximately 200 cases from each residential area. The urban sample included 98 younger and 102 older persons, and the rural sample included 102 younger and 98 older men and women. No institutionalized persons were included.

All homes in each city block and in each area of rural land in the samples were visited by an interviewer to obtain information from persons in the two stipulated age groups. If a prospective respondent was not at home on the first visit, an appointment was made for a subsequent interview. If more than one person in the same household was to be interviewed, special effort was made to guarantee independent responses. In most cases each respondent in a household was interviewed alone. In the few cases where this was impossible, the interview with one person was completed before another was started. The questions which elicited information for this report were interspersed throughout a 15-page interview schedule.

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[1] The study was made jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station. Field work was financed by the Experiment Station. Interpretations are those of the author and not necessarily of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the Kentucky Experiment Station. Acknowledgement is made to J.S. Brown, A. L. Coleman, J.H. Copp, W. F. Kenkel and M.R. Janssen for advice and assistance; to W. Davenhall and R. King for field work; and to C. Morgan for assistance with tabulation.

The respondents were almost entirely of the Protestant faith, predominantly married, and predominantly white, except for the eight percent Negro in the urban center. About one-third of the older persons were widowed. Women outnumbered men in the samples by a ration of two to one. In both residential areas, the younger age groups, compared with the older, had received more formal education, had higher incomes, and had greater representation in the professional and white collar occupations. The median years of formal education of the younger and older aged persons in the city were 13.5 and 11.5 respectively, and in the rural area, 12.1 and 8.1 respectively. In the urban center, the median of reported annual incomes of the younger and older persons were $4,250 and $1,922, respectively, and in the rural county, $2,063 and $1,001, respectively. The younger generations revealed greater geographic mobility in their backgrounds than did the older age groups. The oldest person interviewed was 93, and the median age of the older persons was 69. About two-fifths of the older people considered themselves retired.

Life satisfactions were assessed by presenting each respondent with 72 statements constituting 24 scales on satisfactions with self, satisfactions with the immediate social environment, and satisfactions in general outlook. Respondents gave an "agree," a "don't know," or a "disagree" answer to each statement. These responses were scored three, two, and one, respectively, permitting a mean score range from three to nine for each set. Intercorrelations among statements on each scale ranged from .73 to .96, indicating that the items in each set did assess a common underlying dimension.

FINDINGS

The findings suggest that life in the metropolitan center provided somewhat greater subjective rewards than life in the Southern Appalachian Region area. However, on some scales the rural people scored higher than the urban, and on a substantial proportion of comparisons no statistically significant differences were found (Table 1).

City life appeared to provide slightly greater gratifications to the older age group than to the younger persons. Respondents age 60 and over in the metropolitan center scored significantly higher than persons of the same age in the rural area on half of the 24 scales. In contrast, younger persons aged 20 to 29 living in the city scored significantly higher than their rural counterparts on only 42 percent of the scales.

Rural life proved to be more satisfying than urban life to equal proportions of old and young. Older rural persons scored higher than older urban persons on 21 percent of the scales, and the scores of younger rural persons exceded those of younger urban persons on the same percentage of scales.

No statistically significant differences in life satisfactions were found between rural and urban respondents on a third of the scales. Younger rural persons did not differ significantly from younger urban persons on 37 percent of the scales, and older rural and urban persons did not differ significantly on 29 percent.

Older adults in the urban center revealed slightly greater life satisfactions than did the younger urban age group. In the urban area, older persons reported greater subjective rewards than the younger on

34 percent of the scales; the younger people revealed greater satisfactions than the older on 29 percent; and on the remaining 37 percent no statistically significant differences were found.

In the samples from the Southern Appalachian Region, the younger persons reported greater life satisfaction than did the older people. In this rural area, life satisfactions of the young exceeded those of the old on 29 percent of the scales; subjective rewards of the old were greater than those accruing to the young on 17 percent; and on the remaining 54 percent no statistically significant differences were found.

Additional insights are available by examining the content of sub-categories of life satisfactions. For this purpose, the 24 scales have been divided into three sub-categories of eight scales each. It is recognized that there may be overlap among the sub-categories. The following analyses are limited to scales yielding statistically significant results.

Satisfaction With Self. The first category of subjective rewards included eight scales (Table 1) which had some reference to the self, such as measures of self-images, self-evaluation of health, feelings of failure and social inadequacy, and retrospective assessments of a happy and satisfying childhood. On three of the scales, the younger and older persons in the rural area scored significantly lower in satisfaction than persons of comparable age in the metropolitan center. The rural respondents, compared with the urban, revealed a more negative self-image - such as lack of confidence and self worth, a more inadequate evaluation of their physical health, and stronger feelings of social inadequacy - such as a need for more close friends and neighbors. On one additional scale, the older rural

persons, compared with the urban aged groups, revealed a significantly greater sense of personal failure - such as feelings of futility with life.

On one scale assessing self-image the rural respondents gave a significantly more positive response than did the urban people. Older and younger persons in the Southern Appalachian Region sample, compared with persons of the same age in the metropolitan center, gave a more favorable evaluation of their childhood. Rural respondents, more than urban, felt their childhood was a happy one and that they had all the things they wanted when they were growing up.

Younger and older age groups in both geographic areas differed significantly on four scales assessing self-image. In both residential areas, the younger persons rated their physical health more favorably on two scales than did the older age group. However, on two other scales, the older people in both residential areas gave more favorable responses. The older people, moreso than the young, considered themselves more friendly, more reliable, and more presentable in appearance. The old, compared with the young, also revealed more satisfaction with their past life - such as pride in their families when they were young and pride in their parents and relatives.

Satisfaction With Immediate Social Environment. A second category of life satisfactions contained eight scales which attempted to assess rewards from the immediate social environment, such as measures of family support and rejection, family worries, adequacy of housing and lack of money, and assessments of neighborhood and community. On four of the scales, younger and older persons in the rural area scored significantly lower in satisfaction than persons of comparable age in the city. Rural persons, compared

with urban, worried more about their families and relatives, were less satisfied with their housing, felt more financial deprivation, and expressed greater dissatisfaction with the communities in which they lived. On one additional scale - concerned with family finances - the older rural persons revealed more worries than did the urban older age group.

Respondents in the rural area - young and old - scored higher in satisfactions than comparable age groups in the city on two scales. The rural samples, moreso than the urban, felt they could count on their families for financial help and advice, and the rural people moreso than the urban felt that their respective neighborhoods were ideal places in which to live.

In the rural area, younger and older persons reacted differently to a significant degree on four scales assessing their immediate social environments, while in the metropolitan center the two age groups differed significantly on five. In the rural samples, the young, compared with the old, revealed less family rejection, greater worries about family finances, more dissatisfaction with housing, and less favorable convictions about the desirability of their neighborhoods. In the urban center, the respective scores of young and old concided with those in the rural county on the same four scales, but on one additional scale the young revealed stronger feelings of deprivation than their elders, and this was on dissatisfactions arising from lack of money.

General Outlook. A third category of eight scales attempted to evaluate the more general outlook of the respondents, such as thoughts and feelings of pessimism, dreariness, emptiness, and deprivation; positive views of religion and time perspectives; and general gratifications and happiness.

On three of the eight scales, younger and older age groups in the rural samples scored significantly lower in subjective rewards than did persons of comparable ages in the metropolitan center. Young rural persons, compared with young urban persons, revealed greater pessimism, stronger feelings that life was empty, and a more negative perspective on use of time. On the other hand, young rural people scored higher than young urban people on two scales - on satisfaction derived from religion and on feelings of general gratifications.

Older rural people, compared with the aged in the city, evidenced greater dreariness in their lives, stronger feelings of emptiness in their existence, and a more acute sense of social deprivation. However, older people in the rural environment scored higher than their counterparts in the metropolitan center on two scales - feelings of general happiness and assessment of general gratification.

Age group differences in general outlook were greater in the urban than the rural area. Young and old in the city differed significantly on six scales, while in the rural environment the two generations differed significantly on only three. In the metropolitan center, the older group, compared with the young, revealed stronger feelings of pessimism, dreariness, and emptiness, a more negative time perspective, and stronger sentiments of general unhappiness. On one scale - that assessing gratifications from religion - the older urban people scored higher than did the urban young people. In the Southern Appalachian Region samples, the older generation, compared with the younger, revealed stronger feelings of dreariness and general unhappiness, but, like their urban counterparts, greater subjective rewards from their religion.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

The foregoing data on life satisfactions permit several inferences and observations. It is not surprising that life in a designated rural poverty area of the Southern Appalachian Region would provide less subjective rewards than life in a metropolitan center. However, it is to be noted that satisfactions from urban living were greater among the old than among the young generations. It is also to be noted that on a sizeable number of comparisons the rural poverty area offered more subjective rewards to old and young than did the urban center, and that on an even greater number of comparisons there were no significant differences in satisfactions. The greatest rural-urban disparaties were found in satisfactions with immediate social environmental conditions, while rural-urban differences in self-image and general outlook were of less magnitude.

Comparisons between younger and older persons in the two residential areas suggest that the age groups possess characteristics of social strata, and that the more favorable responses of the young reveal some of the inequalities imposed on older persons. However, it is to be noted that the older age persons in both residential areas scored higher in subjective rewards than did the younger people on a sizeable number of comparisons, and that on an even larger number of comparisons there were no significant differences between the two age groups.

One category of subjective rewards - those derived from immediate social environmental conditions - deserves special comment. On this category of comparisons, the older people in both residential areas revealed greater satisfactions than did the young people. This finding may reflect two cultural conditions existing in American society. One is

the commonly observed tendency of older people to adjust to and accept their conditions of life. The other is the tendency of younger persons to be dissatisfied with conditions of life. It is to be noted that the younger persons in the rural area revealed greater dissatisfactions with their immediate social environment than did young persons in the urban center.

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TABLE 1. MEAN SATISFACTION SCORES OF PERSONS AGED 20 TO 29 AND 60 AND OVER IN AN URBAN AND A RURAL AREA OF KENTUCKY: 1971.

Satisfaction		Urban		Rural		T-Value			
		Younger	Older	Younger	Older				
		A	B	C	D	A:B	C:D	A:C	B:D
Self-Image		(N=98)	(N=102)	(N=102)	(N=98)				
Positive image	+	6.44	7.42	6.57	7.23	-5.29***	-3.86***	-0.73	-1.03
Negative image	-	5.25	5.41	6.17	6.52	-0.69	-1.29	-3.74***	-4.10***
Positive health	+	6.87	5.88	6.55	-5.41	3.59***	3.76***	1.22	1.50
Negative health	-	4.83	6.45	5.84	7.00	-5.52***	-3.63***	-3.36***	-1.77*
Failure	-	5.10	5.22	5.42	5.69	-0.46	-0.98	-1.17	-1.90*
Inadequacy	-	6.22	5.97	6.85	7.02	0.84	-0.53	-2.04*	-3.39***
Happy past	+	5.77	6.55	5.89	6.48	-3.86***	-2.76**	-0.62	0.33
Positive past	+	6.03	6.20	6.50	6.71	-0.71	-0.97	-2.27*	-2.10*
Social Environment									
Family support	+	6.84	7.18	7.85	7.84	-1.38	0.08	-5.09***	-2.76**
Family rejection	-	5.28	6.06	5.58	6.45	-3.15**	-3.47***	-1.31	-1.47
Family worry	-	4.73	4.38	5.57	5.96	1.40	-1.29	-3.12**	-5.41***
Family finances	-	6.11	5.09	6.41	5.96	4.09***	1.65*	-1.17	-3.21**

\+ High score positive
\- High score negative

* P < 0.05
** P < 0.01
*** P < 0.001
one tail test

TABLE 1 (cont.)

Satisfaction		Urban Younger A (N=98)	Urban Older B (N=102)	Rural Younger C (N=102)	Rural Older D (N-98)	T-Value A:B	T-Value C:D	T-Value A:C	T-Value B:D
Poor housing	-	5.23	4.77	6.04	6.72	1.75*	-2.13*	-2.72**	-6.64***
Lack money	-	6.53	5.59	7.19	6.71	3.15**	1.57	-2.39**	-3.46***
Good neighborhood	+	5.85	7.21	6.98	8.11	-4.97***	-4.83***	-4.36***	-3.66***
Community not good	-	4.69	4.72	5.32	5.31	-0.09	-0.25	-2.43**	-2.15*
General Outlook									
Pessimism	-	4.89	6.29	6.48	6.64	-5.29***	-0.65	-6.10***	-1.38
Dreariness	-	4.68	5.13	4.91	6.05	-1.84*	-4.11***	-1.06	-3.09**
Emptiness	-	6.38	6.07	6.70	6.57	-1.65*	0.54	-1.65*	-2.25*
Deprivation	-	6.27	6.02	6.71	6.99	0.80	-0.97	-1.51	-3.18**
Religious	+	5.67	8.18	6.77	8.09	-9.16***	-4.10***	-3.20**	0.34
Time positive	+	6.63	5.90	6.16	5.95	3.21**	0.83	2.17*	-0.23
Gratification	+	6.42	6.88	7.38	7.40	-1.59	-0.06	-3.37***	-1.98*
Happiness	+	6.87	6.14	7.05	6.53	3.43***	2.26*	-0.79	-1.85*

+ High score positive
- High score negative

* P < 0.05
** P < 0.01
*** P < 0.001
one tail test